

How Real is Reality? (Only as real as your brain makes it) v .7.6.2 by Norman K. Breslow, 2018

(This essay adds a bunch of information to my earlier essay, ***how real is reality?***, which I've included in this expanded essay.)

First off, I want to EMPHASIZE that EVERYTHING you know, EVERYTHING you think, EVERYTHING you like, EVERYTHING you don't like, EVERYTHING you see, EVERYTHING you hear, EVERYTHING you smell, EVERYTHING you feel, ***EVERYTHING***, is a product of your brain. And since your brain is different from all other brains, your world and everything in it is unique to you. Further, what you think you experience just isn't so. You see, there isn't anything out there. (I'm not convinced that we exist out there, or anywhere.)

If you do take the above as being factual, I realize that you are having a hard time believing that there isn't anything out there, and that everything you know is just a product of your brain. So let's have a look at color. You see, color does not exist in nature. It's a product of your brain. Color is nothing more than "vibrations" (frequencies of light rays) your brain senses, and then your brain dials in the appropriate color for that vibration (frequency). Similar to how Ted Turner used early computers to convert black and white movies into color movies. Really, your brain does convert gray-scale images into color images.

The following quote is from the first page of *Understanding Color*, a nifty 25 page pamphlet published in 1994 by 3M Imaging, a division of the 3M Corporation:

Imagine a world without color---for that is what really exists. All the objects that surround us have no color.

But your brain convinces you that you are seeing color. And your brain convinces you of a lot of other things that just ain't so. You can explore this fact by searching for Color Theory and similar topics on the 'net, or by taking a course in the area of Sensation & Perception in a college psychology department, or by searching for articles on Sensation & Perception you can find with a search engine.

How Real is Reality? (Only as real as your brain makes it) v. 6.0 2005-2017

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Have you ever looked at a cloud and seen something other than the cloud, like a tree, or a horse, or part of a car, or a breast, or a zipper, or a schematic of a Pentium chip? I'm sure

you have. Well, maybe not the chip. These images appear because your brain takes bits of cloud detail, a dark splotch here and a swirl there, and combines them into something more meaningful to you. Some people organize the visual information one way, while other people organize the same information in another way. Psychologists call this organization process "PROJECTION". Because each of us has a different personality, each of us is apt to make up, or see, different objects. To mangle a phrase, different visuals for different folks. However, while each person's projections are unique to that person, people with similar personalities are apt to create similar projections (visuals).

The understanding that people project different visuals and meanings onto clouds did not escape psychologists and psychiatrists. In the 1920's, the Rorschach ink blot projective test started to be used as a personality test. You are probably familiar with the Rorschach and similar tests. They usually consist of black irregular blots on a white background.

The Rorschach is a "test" because it has been standardized, that is, a lot of people have told shrink what they see in the different ink blots, and their answers have been grouped according to personality types. For example, pessimists might see a witch in one of the ink blots, while optimists might see a clown in the same ink blot. Neither the ink blots nor the clouds contain any objective information. Both are "abstract" or "non objective" as far as their shapes are concerned. But both can be used to elicit information from the viewer, such as a picture of a witch or a clown, a horse's head or a castle.

Other types of "projective tests" exist. While some also rely on non objective or abstract shapes similar to those found in the ink blots, others use objective material to elicit a projected response from the viewer. For example, a person might be shown a series of cartoon like sketches depicting various vague situations, and the viewer is asked to make up a story about what is happening. One sketch might show a younger man sitting behind an office desk, while an older man stands to his side, looking at the younger man. One viewer might say that the older man is the boss who has stepped into the younger man's office to congratulate him on doing a good job, while another viewer might say that the younger man is the boss who has called the older man into his office to chew him out. Of course, there is no right or wrong interpretation of the sketch, just as there is no right or wrong interpretation of an ink blot. Different personality types will interpret the drawings, or ink blots, differently.

To summarize, the human brain organizes bits and pieces of information into something that is meaningful to the viewer. Viewers with similar personality types will see similar objects when looking at non objective material, or create similar stories when looking at representational material. The objects or stories do not exist in the stimulus material. They are created by the viewer to explain, or give a meaning, to the brain's grouping of the visual data. These stories are called projections by psychologists and psychiatrists.

We all project. All the time. The ability and need to project is apparently hard-wired into our brains. It is part of being human. My personal motto is, "Life is a projective test". People project even when looking at material that does contain meaningful content. To give an example of this point, let's consider Siskel and Ebert, the movie critics. They often see the same film, sometimes in the same theater at the same time, and draw two very different conclusions about it. Sometimes they disagree so vehemently that one wonders whether they really saw, and are reviewing, the same film. You have probably gone to the movies with a friend and come away with very different impressions of the movie. The difference between

you and your friend, and Siskel and Ebert, is that the latter are professional movie critics who presumably are using some type of objective criteria to form their opinions, while you and your friend presumably are not professional critics using objective criteria to form your opinions. You just like or dislike what you see. Siskel and Ebert are supposed to have objective reasons for liking or disliking what they see. The truth of the matter is that Siskel and Ebert are humans. They project. Their projections (opinions) are no more meaningful, or “right”, than any one else’s. However, they have convinced other people that their opinions are extremely insightful.

To the reader who asks, “Are you saying that there isn’t any ‘reality’?”, I reply, “Yes”. A “reality” may exist, of course, but it is filtered through our brains and personalities, and gets distorted. The mere fact that people disagree all the time about politics and religion should be a big clue to you that each of us sees the world in a unique way. Each of us has our own reality. Each of us projects differently. Interestingly, each of us tends to tell ourselves that the way we view something is the correct way, and those who disagree are wrong. Some people have a difficult time dealing with the fluidity of reality. They want, or need, an absolute reality. If you are that personality type, fine, just tell yourself that there is one reality, that you see it, and that anyone who doesn’t see it your way is wrong. For the rest of you who can accept that we human beings do project our personalities onto every situation we find ourselves in, the silliness of the pronouncements of the art critics and historians and others should be self-evident by now. After all, their insights are just stories they make up to explain their brain’s grouping of information, ala Siskel and Ebert reviews.

The intellectually honest art critic (laughing my ass off at that oxymoron) would state, at the top of each review, that the review is only his opinion, based on his personality. He would state that he projected onto each painting or sculpture or other art piece a meaning, and then made up a story to explain the projection to himself. He would state that he is now writing down this story for you to read. But this doesn’t happen.

Instead, the critic tries to give the impression that what he is writing is “The Truth”. It is “Reality”. If he likes the art, it is because the art is good, based on objective criteria. If he doesn’t like the art, it is because the art is bad, based on objective criteria. It is not because he has created a story to explain his feeling about the art, and that he has a feeling about the art because the art has elicited a reaction from him, in the same manner that a cloud or ink blot elicits a reaction from him. The art critic maintains that his review is factually correct, based on his knowledge of art and his wonderful insight into the artist’s mind. Instead, his review is based on his projection, which is a product of his personality (or lack thereof).

Keep in mind that if you are human, everything you know is a product of your brain.